

# PROMOTIONAL EVENT IDEAS

## Promotional Event Ideas

Community and media events are the cornerstone of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**; holding an event can be an exciting and important way to make a difference in your community. The impact your organization can have by spreading a lasting message of recovery throughout your community can be beyond measure.

**Recovery Month** events, no matter how large or small, can go a long way in promoting the benefits of recovery. Following are examples of events of all sizes that resulted in the dissemination of positive and personal messages of recovery in communities across the country.

The city of New Orleans, for example, hosted **Sober Jam**, an all-day statewide family event that celebrates recovery from addiction. The event was free and open to the public and aimed to show individuals that treatment works and that recovery from addiction is possible. Approximately 15,000 attendees from across Louisiana participated in the event in 2004, which included live music and indigenous cuisine, while strolling through a health and information fair. **Sober Jam** has proven to be quite successful in Louisiana and is expanding to other states throughout the country.

Though larger events attract a lot of attention, moderately sized programs can be just as effective in promoting the benefits of recovery. Organizers of **Recovery Month** events in Syracuse, NY, for example, have generated the momentum for change in their community through several years of successful **Recovery Month** luncheons that frequently draw more than 100 people. With each luncheon, the Syracuse community re-emphasizes its commitment to helping people with substance use disorders achieve and sustain recovery. The mayor and other elected officials and community leaders attend the events to deliver proclamations and words of support to people in recovery.

Events can be held to fit any community's needs. Smaller scale events can include forums in local churches or public facilities. One such example is a September 2004 **Recovery Month** forum in Richmond, Virginia. At that event, people in recovery shared their stories of success with an audience of about 50 community members. For additional event ideas, visit the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) and review information posted about a variety of events held in previous years.

Across the country, hundreds of successful **Recovery Month** events have helped raise awareness of issues regarding substance use disorders and recovery. From professional sports stadiums to town parks, messages of recovery are being promoted at a variety of creative events and venues in communities like yours. Now is your chance to build on these successes and plan an event of your own.

This year, **Recovery Month** encourages community members to change attitudes and work together to eliminate the stigma surrounding substance use disorders. It calls attention to the importance of:

- Assessing individuals who experience these disorders
- Referring them to treatment and support programs
- Making treatment programs available and accessible to individuals and their families, and making sure that family members are assessed and encouraged to seek services as well
- Ensuring adequate resources for a full range of treatment services to accommodate individual treatment needs that help people improve their lives and rejoin their communities
- Ensuring that adequate recovery support services are available for affected children (e.g., student assistance programs and other resources for families touched by addiction)

All of this will help those in recovery, family members, and friends to live the **Recovery Month** 2005 theme: ***“Join the Voices for Recovery: Healing Lives, Families, and Communities.”***

You can help spread this message in your community in a number of ways, including planning media events, community forums, and other activities. Please consider the ideas listed below as a starting point. The tips are designed to help you maximize the success of your programs or events, and can help change attitudes by putting a human face on addiction and recovery in September and throughout the year.

## **How Can I Use a Media Event to Spread the Recovery Month Message?**

Inviting media in your community to attend a **Recovery Month** press event can lead to local media coverage about the importance of treating substance use disorders and the benefits of recovery. Successful media events contain two key elements that draw attention: a focus on a specific newsworthy activity and the involvement of prominent speakers from the community.

Newsworthy activities could include:

- Gala events or award presentations that honor those making a difference in the fight against the disease of addiction, such as a local company or community leader that championed a drug-free workplace program or recovery program

- The opening of a new treatment center
- Tributes that recognize individuals and families in recovery and are held at community gatherings, in faith-based settings, or at sporting events, such as high school sporting events, minor league baseball games, and professional sporting leagues
- An event (such as a run/walk) to recognize and celebrate recovery
- A government official's or agency's issuance of a civic proclamation (see sample of proclamation and tips in the "Media Outreach" section of this planning toolkit)
- A statewide, municipal, or county community forum or celebration of **Recovery Month** in which local leaders address substance use disorder issues in your community

To make the most of the news value of this type of activity, select a roster of prominent speakers and ensure they have something noteworthy or interesting to say. Participants in a press event could include a member of Congress, a state legislator, the mayor, the governor, city council members, community leaders, and noted citizens from your area who are in recovery.

The event can begin with an individual in recovery saying a few words, introducing the event, taking part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony, or signaling the start of a race. Individuals coming forward about their experiences in recovery can speak with the media without violating the "anonymity" practice of traditional mutual support groups. Many of these groups permit people to share their stories as long as their membership in the group is not disclosed. When planning events, organizations can simply alert participants that the media has been invited so that they can observe the anonymity tradition.

Getting the media to attend your press event is only the first step. Once they arrive, distribute press kits to members of the media. Press kits should include:

- A press release
- Speaker biographies
- Fact sheets about the issue and your organization

(A sample press release and fact sheets are included in this planning toolkit, along with tips for speaking with the media.) These tools will help the media flesh out their stories about your **Recovery Month** event. Make sure to include the name and phone number of a contact person from your organization to answer any additional questions.

Following up at the end of your event is important. At the conclusion of any press event, invite members of the media to raise questions and interview participants. Finally, make sure to send thank-you notes to non-media attendees following the event.

## How Can I Use a Community Forum to Spread the *Recovery Month* Message?

You can hold a community forum to raise awareness about recovery issues in your local area.

A community forum brings together a panel of community leaders to discuss a specific topic—in this case, substance use disorder treatment and recovery. The panel could include:

- Public officials and civic leaders
- Local treatment providers
- Employers
- Health professionals
- Educators
- The media
- Community leaders
- Members of the faith community
- Individuals in recovery

These forums have the potential to unite people with substance use disorders, people in recovery, their families, and allies in a community effort. They support collaboration among state and local systems of care responsible for various aspects of the issue, such as assessing and referring people to treatment programs, helping people obtain access to that treatment, and treating substance abuse with the same attention as other treatable medical conditions.

When planning this type of event, select an experienced, and preferably, well-known moderator, such as a television anchor, professor, counselor, or clergy person. The moderator's role is to keep the event on schedule and keep the discussion focused. Moderators also introduce panelists and generally facilitate the forum.

To enhance public interest in your forum, consider organizing it around a widely publicized event already taking place, such as a local festival, sporting event, or business conference. Another option is to hold a legislative forum that has the support of a member of Congress, a state legislator, a civic leader, or other elected official. These government representatives attract media attention and strive to achieve support for policies and funding, as well.

Media coverage can help you expand your forum to a wider audience. In addition to inviting newspaper reporters to the forum, you can contact local television, radio, and cable stations prior to your community forum to investigate the possibility of airing the forum in its entirety, either live or taped. Broadcasting your forum on the Internet through your organization's Web site can help spread the message to people who could not attend the forum in person.

Another way to publicize your forum and to encourage greater attendance is by posting announcements about the event on community bulletin boards. You may want to ask local service organizations, employers, and mental health and faith-based organizations to promote your event through their newsletters and Web sites and by posting announcements in their buildings. Specific tips on ways to involve community groups such as these to spread the **Recovery Month** message are provided toward the end of this document.

## Tips for Planning and Generating Media Coverage of Events

- Select a specific topic or focus for your event.
- Avoid competing with other organizations' **Recovery Month** activities by coordinating the times and dates with your colleagues, and posting and cross-checking them on the calendar of local events posted on the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov). You also may cross-check the calendar of events listed by the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at [www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/calendar](http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/calendar).
- To increase media attention, select a location that is easily accessible and that accommodates people with special needs, such as a park, public building (public grounds require special permits), or treatment center. The media are more likely to attend your event if it is held at a location they believe their audiences can identify with, that is visually appealing to maximize photo opportunities, and that is quick and easy to get to.
- Select an effective forum moderator or event host. (See tips on selecting moderators mentioned on the previous page of this document.)
- Compile a list of participants and speakers. Provide speakers with an agenda and time limit for their remarks; keep the remarks brief. Obtain copies of their remarks in advance to ensure that a variety of points and perspectives are represented and that different speakers' remarks do not overlap.
- Send local media (newspaper, radio, television) an advisory in advance of the event, and fax or e-mail a press release the morning of the event (templates are included in this planning toolkit). In addition, many local television stations have a calendar of local events that could be used to encourage community members to attend.
- Follow up with calls to the media to encourage coverage of the event. After the event, collect clips of the media coverage you garnered for future use. You also can share the success of your media outreach by sending samples of the media materials you produced and the media clips you gathered to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment at the address included at the end of this document. Additionally, please provide valuable input by completing the Customer Satisfaction Form enclosed in this planning toolkit.

When planning events, remember the unexpected can happen. Your ability to plan for contingencies is critical to the success of your event. Some additional things to keep in mind include:

- Outdoor events can be weather-dependent. Have a back-up venue or a rain date.
- If your guest list expands, be sure you have adequate seating for all participants.
- Speakers can be delayed, get sick, or have last-minute conflicts. Have a back-up speaker or revised agenda.
- Check all audiovisual equipment to be sure it is in proper working order and that those running the equipment know how to use it.
- Arrange for speakers and participants to arrive at least half an hour early and provide them with a private room in which to prepare. If the media will be present, discuss talking points with speakers in advance to ensure they focus on the event topic.

## **What Other Activities Can Help Spread the *Recovery Month* Message?**

**Workplace Partnerships.** Ask major employers in your area to join with you in promoting the messages of *Recovery Month* to their employees. Ask them to display *Recovery Month* posters in areas where employees congregate. Employers can host seminars that discuss substance use disorders, their warning signs, and the importance of treatment and recovery for the health of individuals, family, friends, and the community. You also can contact local employers to educate them about the need to approach treatment of substance abuse with the same urgency as other medical conditions.

**Health Fairs.** Coordinate with other organizations to sponsor a health fair that addresses multiple health-related issues. Have booths for local treatment centers and mutual support groups to offer information and speak about how they help people in your community. Offer informational materials for those who might be in need of treatment or know of someone who could benefit from it, and invite local civic and community leaders to speak on substance use disorder topics. Encourage families to attend the fair by incorporating health-related games, activities, and giveaways into the event, including information for children living with a family member with an alcohol or drug problem.

**Exhibit Booths.** Set up an exhibit booth at a local hospital, community center, health fair, or wellness event to disseminate information about effective treatment options and related subjects.

**Recovery Weekend.** Coordinate with faith leaders for a Recovery Weekend, a time when religious leaders make recovery the topic of their sermons/homilies across all denominations. Discuss the importance of treatment and recovery and the impact on the individual, family members, and the community. Faith leaders can identify ways to help their congregations better understand the nature and impact of substance use disorders within families and the need to provide support and encouragement to the children of people with these disorders.

**Athletic Activities.** Get involved in local sports at the high school, college or even professional level. Work with the schools and coaches to educate students on the dangers of steroids and other legal and illegal performance-enhancing drugs. Ask local teams, such as minor league baseball teams, to recognize **Recovery Month**. In recent years, some **Recovery Month** events have been staged at amateur, semi-professional, and professional sporting events. Coordinate a recovery walk/run or marathon, basketball or tennis tournament, or similar event. Hosting activities of this nature will provide a positive outlet for all members of the community, bringing them together to celebrate **Recovery Month**.

**High School or Local College Assemblies.** Coordinate with the principals of local high schools and officials from local colleges to convene assemblies that discuss substance use disorders, their warning signs, and the importance of treatment and recovery for the health of individuals, family, friends, and the community. Invite youth in recovery to share personal stories at the assembly.

**High School or Local College Essay Contest.** Work with student assistance coordinators and/or school counselors to invite students to submit essays about the impact that recovery from a substance use disorder has had on their lives, either through their own experience or that of a parent or loved one. Consult individual school and district guidelines regarding the sharing of sensitive and personal information by students. Ensure that no participants feel pressured to reveal information of a delicate nature. Establish criteria for judging the entries, such as how well the students demonstrated what they learned from the experience. Partner with a local newspaper to publish the winning entry. Reward winners with a scholarship to help further their education.

**Banners/Ads.** Display banners or ads promoting September as **Recovery Month** in your community's most visible areas and outdoor venues, including outdoor billboards and public transportation ads. You also can add an electronic banner to your Web site by downloading a banner from the 2005 **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).

**Business and Volunteer Organization Distribution Channels.** You can capitalize on local organizations' existing channels for communicating with the general public by placing advertisements about an upcoming event in an organization's newsletter, church bulletin, or in the windows of local stores and restaurants. Ask local businesses to display banners in prominent areas seen by the general public or post notices on their Web sites.

**Media Sponsorships.** Ask local newspapers, radio stations, and television outlets to consider sponsoring your **Recovery Month** event by allowing you to feature their logo on materials promoting your event. A media sponsorship enhances credibility by showing local media support. Typically, only one media outlet will agree to sponsor your event, but other media outlets in your area are likely to attend and cover your event, as well. Media sponsorship also will help increase media coverage of your event.

**Television Partnerships.** Approach local television station managers to collaborate in promoting *Recovery Month*. Ask the station to list community treatment centers on its Web site and create a link to your organization's Web site, as well as the *Recovery Month* Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).

**Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs).** Disseminate the enclosed live-read PSAs to your local radio stations to promote substance use disorder treatment. You can also order recorded radio PSAs to disseminate to local stations by e-mailing [media@health.org](mailto:media@health.org) or calling 240-747-4816.

**Radio Outreach.** Coordinate with a local radio personality and/or station manager to promote your *Recovery Month* event and to mention key messages on the air. Radio is a powerful tool for outreach, because most stations appeal to a certain kind of audience. Take advantage of this by marketing your event to a specific population, such as targeting college or modern rock stations for a college health fair or sports stations for an athletic event.

**Articles.** Write a short article that discusses both the long- and short-term benefits of treating substance use disorders. Include information that gives people a Web site and a telephone number for more information or for help in locating a treatment center. Contact local magazines and weekly/community newspapers personally to introduce them to *Recovery Month* and ask them to run your article. For more information about writing articles, including articles that may appear opposite a newspaper's editorial page, please refer to "Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed," which is located in the "Media Outreach" section of this planning toolkit.

Finally, make sure that for all planned activities, you have materials available that include phone numbers, Web sites, and e-mail addresses people can contact regarding treatment programs.

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month* 2005 with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).

We would like to know about your outreach efforts and community success stories during *Recovery Month*. Please complete the Customer Satisfaction Form enclosed in this planning toolkit. Directions are included on the form.

Please send any of your organization's *Recovery Month* promotional samples to:  
Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment,  
1 Choke Cherry Road, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically on the CD-ROM enclosed in this planning toolkit. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit our Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) or call 1-800-662-HELP.